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HOSPITAL FINANCE AS RELATED TO HOUSEKEEPING¹

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From where does the money come to run a hospital? Some hospitals are financed by the city governments; a city may own and operate a hospital to care for the sick poor who are city charges, and the money comes from the general tax fund. Other hospitals are owned and operated by the county in which they are situated; it is now a state law that every county is required to provide care and treatment for its own tubercular cases. Some hospitals are financed by the state; those for the insane are examples of this kind. These types belong to the great class of public funds hospitals. Other hospitals are the medical departments of large universities, and still others, perhaps the largest in number, are private corporations or private enterprises. Such hospitals may or may not be endowed. A hospital adequately endowed does not solicit funds, but lives on the interest of money invested, usually a legacy which takes the form of a memorial. Other hospitals are humanitarian business propositions, every patient pays and the hospital must earn its own living. There are still other hospitals supported by voluntary subscriptions, wherein no patient pays. The majority of hospitals, not supported from public funds, use a combination of the other methods. Each has a small endowment fund, which partly pays expenses, each has an earning capacity as large as it can be made from paying patients, and each solicits money from friends to be spent in the care of free bed patients. There is really no such thing as a free bed patient, though one who does not pay for himself is so called. The cost of every patient is paid, if not by the patient, by some special fund or by some private subscription. If this were not so, hospitals doing free bed work would be in debt to the grocer, the baker, the butcher, etc.

The financial end of hospital work is one of a superintendent's important duties. It carries with it, first, the anxiety of getting or not getting money; next, the task of spending it wisely, and then the responsibility of the use or misuse of what is bought with the money. Often nurses do not know about the money side of hospital work, sometimes they do not care; in either case the hospital and nurses are both losers. There is a difference between spending hospital money and one's own money. A private individual may buy young duckling for dinner and it is nobody's business but his own. If young duckling is bought for the

¹ Address to the senior nurses of the training schools of Rochester, N. Y., part of a course being given under the auspices of the Genesee Valley League of Nursing Education.

hospital family, men directors, lady managers, or visiting doctors may rightly criticise the superintendent for spending on one dinner the price of three less costly dinners of equal food value. The private individual may eat bread without butter to counteract the extravagance of the duckling, but the superintendent may not withhold butter from her family. She is under obligation to supply a certain amount of fat in each day's ration and may not lightly break that obligation. Every penny of hospital money must be accounted for in black and white, and any expenditure may be censured by those in a position to do so. In my opinion, a full-time job for some one person, in any hospital of over 100 beds, is the buying, the dispensing and the *teaching* of buying, dispensing and using. Unfortunately, this full-time job is only part of what the average hospital expects of its superintendent, and for lack of some one's full attention to this work, the hospital gets but little coöperation from pupils who have not had an early training in home economics. We are being taught that our only real value is our social value, and I know whereof I speak when I say that the common good would be promoted by the use of knowledge and judgment in hospital finances as related to housekeeping.

Knowledge of food values is needed in both the cure and the prevention of sickness. In my opinion no hospital, however small or poor, can afford to be without a dietitian, who should be given as much latitude as she can use wisely. A dietitian, to do her best work, must do it under favorable circumstances; if she does not do her best work, the hospital does not get the best returns on its investment. We are too apt to complain when we don't like our food, too apt to say nothing when we do like it, and too apt to judge food by its acceptability to our palate rather than by its caloric value.

The food question this year has assumed proportions hitherto unknown in this country. It is a factor in winning the war, and has an importance other than in dollars and cents. A food commission is acting in this state, and it is our patriotic duty to follow the recommendations of that commission. We are being asked to have one or more meatless days, and one or more wheatless days each week, not to save money for those abstaining, for it is quite likely that the substitutes used will equal in money value the meat or the wheat; we are asked to abstain in order that the amount so released may be sent to our Allies and used for our troops across the water. Meat, wheat, fat and sugar are needed in France. Perishable articles are for home consumption. I know of a two-year-old who sits at table in a high chair and says with approval or disapproval, as he looks at his own and his neighbor's plates: "Mr. Hoover says you must eat everything on your plate." I suppose Mr. Hoover's idea is that if we eat what is on our plates, whether we want it or not, particularly not, next time we will be careful to take only the right amount. Anyone who

is familiar with the garbage pail of a hundred-bed hospital, knows that the saving effected by following this rule would run into hundreds of dollars annually. Lamb chops are 12 cents apiece; we have no business to eat lamb at any price. Lamb should grow into mutton before being eaten, meanwhile growing wool for soldiers' uniforms. Dried beef is 40 cents a pound, bacon 38 cents, pork 32 cents. All dairy products are scarce; feed is high and herds too few; many herds have been eaten as beef. Sugar is being shared with our Allies who also need our wheat. Shipping space is limited and wheat packs much nutritive value in small space.

Elimination of waste should be practised along other lines than that of food; surgical supplies, for instance: gauze, cotton, adhesive plaster, ether, alcohol, rubber goods, sutures, surgical instruments and needles; also in the laundry, pharmacy, and every other department. All waste, whether of time or energy or of the more tangible products, is a waste of money.

A bedstead costs \$10, a mattress \$10, a mattress cover \$1, 2 pillows \$4, 8 sheets \$12, 6 pillow cases \$2, 4 blankets \$12, 2 spreads \$3, 4 night-gowns \$4 (for the patient who uses the bed), 12 towels \$2, rubber sheet \$2, bedside table \$8, 2 chairs \$10, share \$20, making a total of \$100.

The \$20 is for a share in the utensils, such as bed pan, water bottle, the dishes and silver from which he eats, and the basins and tubs from which he bathes, bed rests, wheel chairs and ward equipment, making the initial cost \$100 per bed; \$1000 for 10 beds; \$2000 for 20 beds, etc. Please think of these figures and also that it would cost \$1800 to replace 1200 sheets, \$600 to replace 600 nightgowns.

The wear and tear is much greater than one would suppose on beds equipped with wheels. Wheels cost from \$3 to \$12 per bed. Bedsteads are rolled across the floor and are often shoved quickly over the door-sill, which process, many times repeated, bends the legs of the bed until they look like candidates for the orthopedic department. The enamel paint is knocked off by repeated contact with door frames. I estimate that the life of a bedstead which was once thirty years, is now about six.

Mattresses are ruined by using defective rubbers, and rubbers become defective by being creased and folded. Sheets, which now cost \$1.50 each, are torn and stained, and the wearing life is reduced one-half by too frequent washings. Anything said of sheets applies equally to pillow cases, spreads, gowns and towels, and even more to blankets; nothing ruins a blanket like the washing of it.

The laundry presents unusual problems. Due to the scarcity of dye material, bluing has advanced from \$2.75 a pound to \$9.50. Clothes washed without bluing soon acquire a grayish tinge, to which we soon may be accustomed if the price of blue becomes prohibitive. Bleach or washing

soda has doubled in price. Washings dried out of doors, when weather conditions permit, are whitened by the action of the sun. Institution clothes, numbering thousands daily, for reasons which are plain to you, cannot be dried in the open. Hence some mild bleaching agent is usually mixed with the soap to take the place of the sun's action. Laundry soap, which used to be 4 cents is now 24 cents. I know no substitute for soap, and no way in which clothes can be washed without soap, and I can only suggest that we use less linen and therefore wash less. I do not approve of the lavish use of linen in our public wards. Lavishness of any kind is out of place in a public ward. I think the amount of clean linen used in our public wards could be cut down one-half without lessening our efficiency, and I think it should be done. Water, being neither an import nor an export, will probably not soar beyond our reach in price, though it costs money to make it hot. As it takes less soap to keep the body clean than it does to wash linen after being soiled by the body, I would suggest that well people might keep their bodies more than ordinarily clean and send sheets, nightgowns and underclothes half as often to the laundry.

In addition to machine work, each plain article laundered is handled thirteen times between leaving the ward, soiled, and returning, clean; to the laundry, sorted in the laundry, put in the washer, out of the washer, in the extractor, out of the extractor, shaken out, into the mangle, out of the mangle, folded, to the linen room, sorted, to the wards. Double clothes, like dresses or gowns, are handled fifteen times, on account of going in and out of the dryer; starched clothes go in and out of the starch tub, extra, making seventeen in all. Our laundry averages 6000 articles a day; think of the monotony of handling each article fifteen or more times every day. Laundry workers hear many complaints about articles lost or torn and they seldom come in contact with the people who are pleased with their work. I believe we are not considerate enough of our laundry workers; it is true they are paid to do this particular work, but it is also true that, like the rest of us, they do not live by bread alone. Commercial laundry men have associations, local and national, they have their own publications: one with which I am familiar, called *Suds*, is well worth reading. Perhaps instruction could be given in the hospital laundry on the chemical action of soap, the mechanism of the machinery, something about the texture of cloth, and anything else, including the germ theory, that would lift laundry work out of the commonplace. That it is considered menial is borne out by the well known phrase, "Let him wash his own dirty linen." Exhaustion from monotony is not confined to the laundry, it catches the executive offices. Like the farmer who plants winter rye and ploughs it under to fertilize worn-out soil, I believe we should reach out for something of contrast that is worth while, and plough it under to increase our efficiency.

The engineer has his troubles, too. It takes coal to produce heat; coal is high and coal is scarce. A French four-story hospital had only one small coal stove last winter, and that was in the hall on the first floor. For three tons of coal to feed this small stove, the proprietors paid \$100. We understand now why pictures of the French soldiers in bed show them in caps and sweaters. No fires were built in the public school houses of a certain city in Massachusetts during the month of September; parents were notified through the newspaper that children were to wear their sweaters and that on an occasional cold day, school would be dismissed rather than to light fires. The engineer's problem is harder than ever, and we should help him in severe weather by keeping doors and windows open for ventilation only, and we may come to heavy underwear. It certainly is unreasonable to expect to sit by an open window lightly clad and be kept warm, when the temperature is freezing outside, and coal is needed to keep munition factories open.

We pay for our electric light by the amount of current burned; the amount would be considerably reduced if we turned on light only as we needed it, and turned it out when not needed. The loss and breakage in bulbs is also considerable. A 25-watt lamp costs 22 cents and under favorable conditions will burn for 1000 hours. Every bulb broken before its time limit expires, is a waste of money. If every bulb issued were dated, we would find how few burned their allotted number of hours.

Those of us who were born at the close of the Civil War, remember the war-time economies then in effect. We who lived in the country remember how apples were used for pies, for sauce, for baking, how those not suitable for winter use were dried in the sunshine of our own yards, how the parings were made into jelly and the siftings were saved for the pigs. We remember that every family kept a pig and killed in rotation, distributing fresh pork among the neighbors, receiving a like contribution when said neighbors killed in turn. We remember that rags were sorted into white, colored and woolen, that the straight, full dress skirts of those days were turned hind side before and upside down, that sheets were turned, to bring the good parts in the center and the worn parts on the edges, that basting threads were saved, and that stiff paper was twisted into lamp lighters, which saved matches by being lit from the living room stove. These particular habits of thrift may not be practiced in this present war, but the underlying principles are the same, and the practice of these principles is being daily put into active operation.

Laborers are scarce. With children in Belgium starving, I am told that grain rotted in western fields for want of men to harvest it. In a neighboring town, \$5 and \$6 per day did not bring pickers for the peach orchards, and peaches were offered for 25 cents a bushel to anyone who would gather and carry them away. With such competition, it is not

strange that our kitchens are short of help and that our halls go unscrubbed. Probably these conditions will grow steadily worse as more men are called into military service. I have a sixteen years' acquaintance with one of the department heads of a wholesale concern. In the past he has often gone abroad to buy, and his time spent in the home plant has been too valuable for an individual customer, except in case of a large or an important order. Yesterday this high official had lost his subordinates through military draft or transfer, and was, himself, unpacking cases and showing goods over the counter to would-be buyers. It certainly behooves us to install any labor-saving device, such as meat-choppers and cake-beaters; to cook by gas, to abolish the labor of firing; to serve dining rooms on the cafeteria plan, and to utilize any scheme that will conserve human time and energy.

In these anxious times money is flowing into the channels of the Red Cross and Y. M. C. A. work, where it is so much needed; but hospitals cannot care for the civilian health or educate nurses whom the Red Cross needs, if money is diverted from them. We must give a good account of ourselves and justify to others the demand for continued support. As no machine yet devised can give personal service to the sick, the hospitals should specialize on personal service, make it a best-seller. The hospitals that give the best personal service have the longest waiting lists. The sick are more than normally susceptible; a frown or a quick word makes them our enemies, and conversely, being susceptible, a smile has unusual value to them, so have gentleness, patience, kindness and thoughtfulness. Personal service makes friends for the hospital. Friends are the best financial asset a hospital can have. The hospital needs friends, the hospital needs funds. Friends and funds go together.

Under the Red Cross Nurses' Bureau, the first of a series of conferences of head nurses of the American base hospitals was held recently in Paris. A plan has been worked out with the army by which the Red Cross will keep on call a reserve supply of nurses and will maintain a nurses' home at which those who become worn out or partially sick in the service can recuperate. The general purpose is to make sure that, whatever befalls, the Red Cross will be in position to keep the Army supplied with nurses in good physical condition. Incidentally, the Red Cross is standardizing and supplying winter clothing for the nurses composing the units which reached France and England in the spring.

Experiments are being made in the matter of diet kitchens. In innumerable instances, a very sick man can be saved by some delicacy or some especially prepared diet, and no matter how good the army ration is, there is seldom anything in it that will tempt him to eat. The Red Cross will supply the necessary apparatus and furnish **materials** from its stores.—From a series of articles entitled, *An Interpretation of the American Red Cross*, by Paul U. Kellogg, in *The Survey*.